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## THE EDINBURGH CONFERENCE AND THE MISSIONARY MESSAGE IN ITS RELATION TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS.

*By Geo. Heber Jones, D.D.*

Among the topics considered at the recent World's Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, that of the missionary message in relation to the non-Christian religions occupies a premier place in the thought of students. It is necessarily a topic vital in its character and fundamental in its importance. It raises the questions: What real and permanent contribution has Christianity to make to the religious thought and life of the world outside the Christian pale? What are the conditions amidst which Christianity must work? What are the elements of truth which will be found awaiting it in other religions as representing the results achieved by the age-long quest of man for the satisfaction of his moral nature? And this all leads to those larger and more vital questions: What will be the interpretation which the races now living in the non-Christian world will put upon Christian truth? In what manner will they translate it into the terms of life and thought?

For two years previous to the Conference, a Commission composed of twenty men was engaged in investigating the various aspects of this subject. Professor D. S. Cairns of Aberdeen, served as chairman, Dr. Robert E. Speer was vice-chairman, and among the distinguished members of the Commission appear the names of Professor W. P. Patterson, of the University of Edinburgh, and Missions-Inspektor Pastor J. Warneck, of Barmen, Germany. In the course of their investigations, the Commission received communications from a long list of 132 different correspondents distributed all over the known world and representing many different nations. These correspondents were confined to the followers

of the Christian faith. In projecting the investigation, they submitted a series of questions directed primarily to bring out the relation of Christianity to other religions. Such questions as these were asked correspondents: Can you distinguish among the doctrines and forms of religious observances current any which are mainly traditional and formal from others which are taken in earnest and are definitely prized as a religious help and consolation? What do you consider to be the chief moral, intellectual and social hindrances in the way of a full acceptance of Christianity? What are the elements in the religion or religions of your field which present points of contact with Christianity and may be regarded as a preparation for it? Which elements in the Christian gospel and the Christian life have you found to possess the greatest power of appeal, and which have awakened the greatest opposition? Have the people among whom you work a practical belief in personal immortality and in the existence of a supreme God?

In addition to these questions which went to all alike, the following questions were addressed to converts to Christianity: What was it in Christianity which made special appeal to you? Did the western form in which Christianity was presented to you perplex you? What are the distinctively western elements as you see them in the missionary message as now presented?

From this partial list of the questions, it will be seen that while the inquiry was necessarily a circumscribed one taken from a predetermined viewpoint, on the other hand, it was a practical and courageous investigation of great questions.

Based on the replies presented, an exhaustive report was prepared and presented to the members of the Conference. It contains many interesting and suggestive things. The Commission divided the various religions under investigation into the following groups: (1) Animistic religions, (2) Chinese religions, (3) Japanese religions, (4) Islam, (5) Hinduism. To the ordinary student this classification appears to be novel and unscientific, but a little consideration leads to the conclusion that the Commission in adopting it at least acted on the principle of consistency. The Edin-

burgh Conference was necessarily dominated by geographical factors in its consideration of the religious life of foreign peoples, and approached the subject from the standpoint of the boundaries of the great mission fields. While this may be consistent, it must also appear to be quite an arbitrary arrangement, for it would be difficult to allege any fundamental grounds for putting in different classes of Buddhism as found in India, in China, and in Japan. However, there is no doubt but what the classification followed lent itself in a very practical and convenient way to discussion in the Conference itself.

In the discussion of the Animistic religions, the work of Pastor Warneck plays a prominent part. The discussion of Animism was necessarily a circumscribed one, but certain salient features were brought into clear relief. The Animistic religion is defined as tradition, for to be religious as an Animist, means to be true to a tribe's tradition. The large part which fear plays in it was clearly emphasized, and its beliefs and observances traced to physical necessity alone; that is, the Animist seeks a physical salvation, that his body may be delivered from the machinations of the host of the unseen world. Even this lowest of the forms of religious life is not without its moral values. On the upper Congo, as well as in other regions, the superstitious rites act as a restraint on stealing and on the practice of inhumanity, because the fear of the spirits keeps wrongdoing in check by a dread that the injured or the departed may revenge themselves.

Several interesting points of contact with Christianity exist: (1) Animism is marked by a wide-spread belief, vague or dormant, but none the less insistent, in the existence of a supreme being. In some regions the animists know a personal god, who made all things and who helps men. (2) There is a wide-spread but very much diluted belief in an after life of the soul. (3) Animistic cults possess the idea and practice of sacrifice, which forms a point of approach by which the Christian atonement may be explained and made intelligible. (4) There is a rudimentary moral sense and a dim consciousness of sin. The African Bantus manifest disquiet when moral law is broken. The aborigines of

India claim that the unclean and maimed are excluded from the next world. The supreme being manifests wrath against man's wrong-doing; he knows everything, and punishes crime such as incest and perjury, falsehood and theft. (5) Animism inculcates the idea of prayer to the supreme spirit. Animistic prayer, however, is not a matter of common and general practice, but prevails in times of special need. As a rule, young people do not observe it, but adults in circumstances of special difficulty and danger seek help through prayer.

Under the religions of China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism were reviewed. The report of the Commission calls attention to the fact that while in the minds of Western scholars these three systems are clearly differentiated, yet among the masses of the Chinese people they are confused with each other, their mutual tolerance resulting in the individual Chinese being dominated by an incongruous mixture of all three. Even though the educated Confucianist professes contempt for the religion of the vulgar, yet in times of sickness, death and other calamities he does not hesitate to have recourse to the consolations of Buddhism and Taoism. Ancestor worship is the universal practice.

In summing up the religious value of these Chinese religions, the Commission makes this statement:

Some devout souls no doubt find help and comfort in the later Buddhist doctrine of Amito Buddha and the Western Paradise, and in the all-pitiful, all-hearing Goddess of Mercy, whose many-headed and many-handed image excites their hope. All classes, too, have a comforting though vague belief in the "Venerable Heavenly Father," who is over all and knows all. There is also a very general belief in the efficacy of prayer and other religious exercises, and no doubt those who are really pious derive help and consolation from all the religious beliefs and ceremonies. But for the great majority these tenets and rites are all traditional and formal. The doctrines do not grip the mind or conscience, and the ceremonies are mere forms. Calamities such as sickness, pestilence, flood, and drought call forth much earnest prayer and anxious worship. But the object sought is material deliverance and help; the spiritual is wholly absent. This, indeed, is the characteristic of Chinese worship at all times. It is not prized for its spiritual help and consolation, but for the material good which it brings in the form of health, wealth, long life, and posterity.

Here again it is interesting to note the points of contact between Christianity and Confucianism. There is every

reason to believe that the Chinese preserve to this day an ancient monotheism which forms a very large gate of entrance for Christianity into Chinese life. This monotheism has been greatly modified in the course of history, and is now but dimly recognized, and yet it is there, constituting a species of preparation for the ultimate religious faith. Scholarly recognition of the high and moral teachings of Mencius is accorded by the report of the Commission, though the point is emphasized that the teaching of the Gospel is necessary to bring out the great moral points in Mencius such as his teaching regarding the heaven-given nature of man, the discipline of sorrow and adversity, reverence for conscience, the Princely Man and the ideals of political government. Thirteen other points of contact are summarized as follows:

1. Divine Providence over human affairs and visitation of human sin are acknowledged.
2. An invisible world above and around this material life is firmly believed in.
3. Moral law is positively set forth as binding equally on men and spirits.
4. Prayer is offered in public calamities as well as for private needs, in the belief that it is heard and answered by spiritual powers.
5. Sacrifices are regarded as necessary to come into closer contact with the spiritual world.
6. Miracles are believed in as the natural efficacy of spirits.
7. Moral duty is taught, and its obligations in the five human relations.
8. Cultivation of the moral character is regarded as the basis for the successful carrying out of the social duties.
9. Virtue is valued above riches and honor.
10. In case of failure in political and social life, moral self-culture and practice of humanity are to be attended to even more carefully than before.
11. Sincerity and truth are shown to be the only basis for self-culture and the reform of the world.
12. The Golden Rule is proclaimed as the principle of moral conduct among our fellow-men.
13. Every Ruler should carry out a benevolent government for the benefit of the people

In this interesting and extremely suggestive list of points of contact with Christianity, the reference to the Golden Rule is particularly notable. It is mentioned four times in the Confucian Analects, and may be translated as follows: What I do not wish men to do to me, I also wish not to do to men. This passage in the Analects appeals far more strongly to Christians than it does to the professed Confu-

cianist. The contrast between it and the Christian's Golden Rule lies in the fact that this is calculated to impose restraint upon unjust and unfair dealings with one's neighbors, while the Christian Rule contains a moral dynamic sufficient to communicate impulse and momentum, thrusting men out into Christlike helpfulness.

In contrast to the points of contact with Christianity, the moral inequalities and weaknesses of the Chinese systems are clearly set forth. In Confucianism it is noted that there is a lack of a doctrine of divine love and of human sympathy with the poor, the outcast and the erring, the absence of faith as an objective movement of the soul, the lack of a realization of the weakness of man's will and of moral bias, the disposition to despise the ignorant and common man, and an undue pride in learning.

The Edinburgh Commission in commenting on Chinese Buddhism makes the paradoxical statement that though it is really atheistic it has kept alive the idea of God. Atheism is far too strong a term to apply to Buddhism, and yet it seems true that the Buddhistic theologies wandered so far afield in their speculations concerning God that they represented him practically as a cipher with the rim knocked off. Buddhism offers certain vital points of approach to Christianity. It has laid emphasis upon prayer and invocation, the urgent need of salvation, and inspired in the hearts of its followers a hope for it. Its doctrine of retribution for sin is corrected by the truth contained in the Christian faith. It has a doctrine of incarnation, and teaches the necessity of self-repression and self-examination. It reaches its highest point of expression in its doctrine of pity, which probably more than anything else contained in Buddhism has been its great civilizing dynamic.

Taoism also in its ancient classical form defines virtue as a thing of the heart with fruit in speech and conduct, and lays before men as the three most precious things—compassion, economy and humility.

It will thus be seen that the religious soil in China is a rich one in which to plant the Christian tree.

The religions of Japan are three:—Shintoism, Confucian-



ism, and Buddhism. Here the basal weakness of the classification adopted by the Commission manifests itself, for Confucianism belongs rather to China and Buddhism to India. It must be conceded, however, that Japan has shown such a wonderful power to originate fresh interpretations in passing the content of Chinese and Indian thought through her own inner consciousness that these alien cults have taken on fresh and new significance in Japan. Shintoism with its code of knightly honor called "Bushido" is defined as a crystallized system of rites for the veneration of personalities closely connected with Japan's existence and history; in other words, a systematized and complicated form of taking off the Japanese hat before the emblems of Japanese ancestors and national heroes.

Buddhism in Japan has taken on new forms, and among the many sects into which that faith has divided, the Shin and Jodo cults practically amount to as great a rehabilitation of original Buddhism as Protestantism has of original Christianity.

Religious life in Japan is marked by a widespread sense of dissatisfaction with the old faiths growing out of the discovery of the lack of spiritual power in these religions. Many Japanese have become keenly conscious of their moral failure. In fifty years, Japan has passed from the agricultural stage of civilization to the industrial stage with its accompanying development of great municipalities. In the old days, the old faiths seemed to furnish a fairly satisfactory solution to the problems growing out of life in rural communities. But to-day Japan like other countries is experiencing the great moral storms which prevail in modern industrial life and which center over great cities. She is facing tremendous moral problems only to find that the old faiths are impotent. They have no adequate answer for modern moral problems. There is, therefore, an unsettling of old religious beliefs and the manifestation of a genuine unrest of soul among the masses of the nation, premonitory of some great religious change.

The Edinburgh Conference was insistent that the missionary of the Christian faith in Japan should take an attitude of sympathetic interest and intelligence toward the old



religions. The elements of good in the old faiths are valuable and should be regarded as preparatory to Christianity.

The treatment of Islam and Hinduism was equally full and complete.

Passing now to the general conclusions reached by the Commission, it is interesting to note that emphasis was laid upon the parallel between the religious conditions prevailing in the world at the time of the rise of Christianity and of the present conditions among non-Christian peoples. The missionaries of the Christian faith stand to-day in the heart of a great battle between the living forces of Christianity and the death-and-life forces of the non-Christian faiths. They behold the sway of an immemorial past over the hearts and souls of men and see the terrific grip which custom projects and the disheartenment growing out of age-long moral failure. Out of the experience of the converts from these faiths comes a new illumination of the real meaning of Christianity, which combined with what the White Race has secured will constitute the sum total of the Christian faith.

The missionary message to the followers of Animistic faiths is the message that God is love and that he has both the power and the will to protect his worshippers. The spell of the reign of terror set up by Animism is broken by the story of the over-shadowing providence of the all-present Father and the divine Saviour and Brother.

The message of Christianity to the followers of the Chinese religions is that of spiritual power. The general testimony which reached the Commission was to the effect that the one thing which the Chinese need to-day beyond everything else is moral power. That ancient and honorable empire has possessed a noble ethical system of which she is justly proud, but within there appears to be lacking a moral dynamic sufficient to realize its ideals. Chinese religious systems impart no inner impulse driving individual men out of themselves and their selfish interests in the quest for higher life. According to the findings of the Edinburgh Conference the great problems which have developed out of Chinese religious conditions are those of moral laxity and religious indifference, re-enforced by a marked tendency towards materialism and buttressed by a deep-seated national pride

in their venerable past. In conveying to the Chinese the message of Christianity its forces have been confronted by the lawful and profound resentment which China feels on account of her treatment by the nations of Christendom. It is thought that Christianity can make a contribution to international good-will by conveying to the people of China in addition to her message of a higher and better moral life a further message of peace and neighborly helpfulness, which shall undo the wrong impression made upon the Chinese consciousness by such international injustice as forced treaties of commerce, the opium traffic, the exclusion of her people from other nations, and the general air of superciliousness maintained by the white races towards China.

In its final conclusions, the Commission made a forceful plea for adequate training in the home colleges of missionary candidates in a deeper knowledge of the content of the non-Christian religions. The average missionary has entered upon his service in the field seriously handicapped by the want of this training, and it was emphasized that the rudiments of this training could better be acquired before arrival at the front. So much time is spent in the acquisition of the language and the pressure of work in the usually undermanned station is so great that it would be extremely difficult for the average student to find the time and strength necessary to secure this adequate knowledge. At the same time, by coming into the field equipped with some theoretical knowledge of the basal principles of these religions, he could then carry on his study of them at first hand with greater facility.

The development of the science of religion has put in the hands of the church a new instrument of spiritual culture and propaganda. It was suggested that all colleges might offer some training in this science and that lectureships on special religions might be instituted by endowment and by coöperation, and missionary specialists enlisted for this purpose.

It was also suggested that missionaries showing special aptitude in the study of native religious life should be given every facility possible and encouraged in preparing written accounts of the religious phenomena they witnessed.